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AN ETHICS COMPARISON BETWEEN THE MILITARY AND  
BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL: DOES SOCIETY HOLD THE  
MILITARY PROFESSIONAL TO A HIGHER STANDARD?

by

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## *Abstract*

Every individual possesses a morality compass. A morality compass is an individual's "inner voice" that provides guidance whenever an ethical dilemma presents itself. I firmly believe that an individual's morality compass is calibrated through innate knowledge, personal experiences, personal values, and organizational affiliations. In this research paper, I will focus on the organizational affiliation aspect.

Society employs a set of ethical standards that it expects all individuals to follow. The question that this paper attempts to address is whether or not society's baseline standard is equally applied to all elements of society, or does society single out certain groups and hold those groups to a higher ethical standard.

In an effort to present sound background information on the military's standard of ethics, I have reviewed the work of numerous authors in the area of military ethics. I have performed the same actions to gain knowledge of standard business ethics and standard society ethics. I intend to present the findings of the various authors and also interject my personal beliefs in order to lay the foundation for the overall discussion. The overall discussion will outline the ethical standards for the military and business professional, along with the ethical standard for society. The discussion will then detail the comparison of the military and business professional ethical standards to those of society in general.

This comparison will highlight certain facts that show that while the military professional does not perceive himself to be of a "higher moral caliber" than the business professional or general society, the military professional is held to a higher ethical standard. The conclusions presented in this paper were reached through the objective review of researched material, along with the author's opinions that were formed through personal experiences.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The term “ethics” refers to “the study of human actions in respect to their being right or wrong.”<sup>1</sup> As individuals, we routinely face situations that require us to make decisions or take actions that others can perceive as being morally right or wrong. There are many factors that contribute to the decision-making process when an individual is faced with what can be perceived as an ethical dilemma. Some of those factors include innate knowledge, personal experiences, personal values, and organizational affiliations. These factors combine to help shape an individual’s morality compass, and it is this morality compass that assists an individual in making the ethically correct decision.

It is pointed out by Randy Cohen that individual ethical behavior is a factor of the society in which we live.<sup>2</sup> This is a statement that I believe to be true in a sense, but I also feel that organizations within that society play the major role in shaping an individual’s ethics. Organizational affiliations such as the churches we attend, the social clubs we join, and the professions we practice are key determinants as to how others will perceive our actions. Society will use these organizational affiliations to set a standard and to judge whether our actions are ethical or unethical.

The organizational affiliation that I want to focus entirely on pertains to the professions that individuals practice. Specifically, I want to look at the ethical standards of the military and

business professional. The most definitive aspect of any organization is its system of values or ethical standards.<sup>3</sup>

The military professional operates in a community that is a subset of society. The community that the military professional operates in has a shared set of values and ethical standards. This shared set of values and ethical standards encompasses what is expressed in normal society but also goes a step further and outlines acceptable behavior that is military-oriented specific. “Loyalty and obedience, integrity and courage, subordination of the self to the good of the military unit and the nation-state, these are among the moral virtues critical to the military function, and they take the form of universal obligations.”<sup>4</sup> The question that needs to be answered in regards to the military professional is to what degree does “going a step further” add value to the standard of ethical behavior.

Similar to the military professional, the business professional also operates in a community that is a subset of society. The business professional is expected to adhere to a shared set of values and ethical standards within his business community. To the business professional ethical considerations must focus on the constituency. The business professional’s constituency consists of customers, employees, communities, society-at-large, suppliers, and investors.<sup>5</sup> The question that needs to be asked concerning the business professional is does the ethical standard detailed by the business community equal or exceed that of the ethical standard set for society in general.

Society provides individuals with a set of ethical standards in an effort to regulate behavior. These ethical standards are based on the ideals of morality, responsibility, personal happiness, and social justice.<sup>6</sup> Individuals apply the various prescribed ethical standards to the facets of daily life in an effort to make ethically correct choices. The lingering question is how does society’s ethical standards measure to the military and business professional’s ethical standards.

While the military and business communities are subsets of society, these three entities of military, business, and society will be treated as being mutually exclusive for the purposes of this research paper. The following chapters will provide detailed information regarding the specific ethical standards of the three entities. Using the detailed information, I will provide a rational conclusion as to why society tends to hold the military professional, not the business professional, to a higher ethical standard. This conclusion was based on my objective review of the researched material. I also relied on my personal opinions that were shaped through actual experiences.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Dale E. Brown and Lloyd J. Matthews, eds., The Parameters of Military Ethics (New York: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, Inc., 1989), 87.

<sup>2</sup> Randy Cohen, The Good, The Bad & The Difference (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 9.

<sup>3</sup> Milton Rokeach, Understanding Human Values (New York: The Free Press, 1979), 51.

<sup>4</sup> Malham M. Wakin, Integrity First: Reflections of a Military Philosopher (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2000), 82.

<sup>5</sup> Rena A. Gorlin, ed., Codes of Professional Responsibility, 3rd ed. (Washington: BNA Books, 1994), 75-76.

<sup>6</sup> Raziel Abelson and Marie-Louise Friquegnon, Ethics for Modern Life, 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 5.



## **Chapter 2**

### **The Ethical Standard for the Military Professional**

The military professional is part of a military community that possesses its own identifiable set of values and ethical standards. “American military service is based on values that U.S. military experience has proven to be the bedrock of combat success. These values adhere to the most idealistic societal norms, are common to all the Services, and represent the essence of American professionalism.”<sup>1</sup> The military professional’s set of values and ethical standards is in addition to what is required by society of an individual. The core concepts of the military professional’s set of values and ethical standards are honor, loyalty, courage, duty, respect, and selfless service. These core concepts are meant to capture the full range of characteristics associated with virtuous conduct, and in some instances their definitions overlap. The information that follows provides a detailed description of each of the military professional’s core concepts.

The notion of honor is the first core concept that I will address. From a military perspective, honor pertains to a time-honored code that relates to self-discipline, humility, and personal character.<sup>2</sup> A military professional is expected to pursue actions and conduct business in a manner that will not bring discredit upon his military service. The military professional is expected to possess a moral fiber in which his every deed reaffirms and supports his oath of office. “A commitment to freedom, to the value of human life, and to equality of opportunity

characterized those who drew up the Constitution and must equally characterize those who profess fidelity to it.”<sup>3</sup> This statement is an attempt to explain the need for the military professional to act in an honorable manner. By demonstrating high moral standards in every endeavor, the military professional practices the first core concept of honor.

The second core concept that I will address is loyalty. Like the core concept of honor, loyalty also relates to the military professional and his commitment to his oath of office. The concept of loyalty that the military professional subscribes to does not pertain to individual relationships. I say this to mean that the military professional’s display of loyalty should not be on an individual or personal level. The military professional’s display of loyalty should be on an organizational level. The military professional, while responsible to his superiors and subordinates, is ultimately accountable to the military organization. “Living in a group demands some subordination of the self to the interests of the group. The military contract demands the total and almost unconditional subordination of the interests of the individual if the interests of the group should require it. This can lead to the surrender of life itself.”<sup>4</sup> This quotation outlines the commitment of loyalty that is required of the military professional to the military organization.

Courage is the next core concept of the military professional’s ethical standard that I will discuss. One can define courage in many different ways. It may mean having the intestinal fortitude to walk down a dark alley in the dead of night, or it may mean having the inner strength to question the actions and decisions of superior officers when those actions or decisions are not in line with the military organization’s ethical parameters. The military professional must have the courage to meet the demands of his profession when the job is hazardous, demanding, and difficult. The military professional must possess the courage to make decisions in the best interests of the organization and country without regard to personal consequences. The military

professional must possess the necessary courage to ensure that the resources that he is entrusted with are used in an efficient, effective manner.<sup>5</sup> To the military professional, courage is the personal value or inner workings of a morality compass that gives an individual the moral and mental strength to do what is considered to be right even in the event of potential personal or professional adversity. Courage is what allows a military professional to act in the best interests of the organization. The survivability of mankind is guaranteed so long as our military leaders are individuals who are intellectually sound, morally good, and courageous.<sup>6</sup>

The fourth core concept of the military professional's ethical standard is duty. Duty is a far-reaching concept that has the ability to encompass many different personal values. To the military professional, duty involves commitment, and that commitment is to the entire organization. Similar to loyalty, duty is an individual's inner sense that links him to the organization. "Duty implies not only the obligation to do one's job conscientiously, but also to do so within ethically acceptable norms."<sup>7</sup> The military professional has a responsibility or "duty" to learn the basic moral or ethical standards of the organization and apply these basic standards to everyday actions. In addition to learning these basic ethical standards, the military professional has a responsibility or "duty" to understand exactly why these basic ethical standards need to be applied to everyday actions. It should be said that the duty of every military professional is to ensure that day-to-day actions seek to improve the quality of the organization and its people.<sup>8</sup>

Respect is the next core concept of the military professional's ethical standard. The word "respect" is defined as the act of feeling or showing admiration and deference to something or someone.<sup>9</sup> The military professional is required to display admiration and deference to both the organization and the people who are a part of the organization. The military organization is one

that is deep-rooted in tradition. In addition to the expansive history, the military organization is one that requires its members to manage “life-altering” circumstances. At some point, the military professional may be faced with the need to take “human life” so that the interests of the organization and its members may be furthered. In my opinion, the choice to “take life” is an ultimate and profound decision. It is for this reason that the military professional must hold the organization that he is a part of in the highest possible regard. The military professional must also hold the members of the military organization in the highest possible regard. A military professional must display the highest possible respect for the organization in which he is a member since that organization will dictate his actions. Also, the military professional must respect fellow members of the military organization and avoid the dangers of “exploitation and degradation of subordinates.”<sup>10</sup>

The final core concept of the military professional’s ethical standard is selfless service. The concept of selfless service links back to the concepts of honor, loyalty, and duty. Selfless service basically pertains to a military professional placing individual goals and desires subordinate to the goals and desires of the organization. It is essential for members of the military organization to work as a unit or team. This combined effort leads to the overall success of the organization. However, if individual military professionals are not willing to suppress personal desires for glorification or recognition, then the organization as a whole is damaged. A military professional must align his personal goals with those of the organization. This selfless act eventually leads to the success of the organization and the individual. “Military service is not just another job. It’s an uncommon profession that calls for people of uncommon dedication. Every military member realizes from day one that his or her individual needs will be

subordinated to the needs of the nation. The Air Force requires a high level of professional skill, a 24-hour-a-day commitment, and a willingness to make personal sacrifices.”<sup>11</sup>

The military professional’s ethical standard can be summarized into the six core concepts of honor, loyalty, courage, duty, respect, and selfless service. These core concepts set the baseline that military professionals are expected to follow if their actions are to be considered ethical by other members of the military organization. When lecturing on moral values at the Air Force Academy in 1970, Sir John Winthrop Hackett stated the following:

“A man can be selfish, cowardly, disloyal, false, fleeting, perjured and morally corrupt in a wide variety of other ways and still be outstandingly good in pursuits in which other imperatives bear than those upon the fighting man. He can be a superb creative artist, for example, or a scientist in the very top flight and still be a very bad man. What the bad man cannot be is a good sailor, or soldier, or airman. Military institutions thus form a repository of moral resource which should always be a source of strength within the state.”<sup>12</sup>

While the definitions and explanations of the core concepts tend to overlap at times, the overall purpose of each concept is to demonstrate a standard of behavior for the military professional.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Joint Publication 1, Joint Warfare of the Armed Forces of the United States (14 November 2000), III-4.

<sup>2</sup> Robert L. Taylor and William E. Rosenbach, eds., Military Leadership: In Pursuit of Excellence (Boulder: Westview Press, 2000), 7.

<sup>3</sup> The Parameters of Military Ethics, p. 111.

<sup>4</sup> Sir John Winthrop Hackett, The Profession of Arms (London: Times Publishing, 1962), 45.

<sup>5</sup> Excerpts are taken from the description of the Navy’s core values of honor, courage, and commitment.

<sup>6</sup> Integrity First: Reflections of a Military Philosopher, p. 106.

<sup>7</sup> The Parameters of Military Ethics, p. 108.

## Notes

<sup>8</sup> Excerpt is taken from the description of the Navy's core values of honor, courage, and commitment.

<sup>9</sup> Definition obtained online from Microsoft Network Learning Dictionary located at <http://encarta.msn.com/>.

<sup>10</sup> The Parameters of Military Ethics, p. xv.

<sup>11</sup> Sheila E. Widnall and General Ronald R. Fogleman, "Core Values," in AU-24: Concepts for Air Force Leadership, eds. Richard I. Lester and A. Glenn Morton (Maxwell AFB: Air University Press, 2001), 81.

<sup>12</sup> Integrity First: Reflections of a Military Philosopher, p. 107.

## **Chapter 3**

### **The Ethical Standard for the Business Professional**

Similar to the military professional, the business professional is also part of a community that possesses its own identifiable set of values and ethical standards. These basic ethical standards may fluctuate or vary between the different business professions. I believe that the reason for this fluctuation or variance in the way different professions within the business community approach ethical standards is dependent upon the interaction that these professionals have with society or the community in general. This research effort will approach the business professional's ethical standard from a generic point of view. This approach will be taken for simplicity purposes. The core concepts that comprise the business professional's ethical standards are integrity, dignity, fairness, justice, and respect.<sup>1</sup> The business professional employs these core concepts of ethical standards when interacting with the constituency of customers, suppliers, leadership, employees, investors, creditors, and community. Like the military professional's core concepts, the business professional's core concepts also attempt to capture the full range of characteristics associated with good business practices and behavior. The below paragraphs will provide detailed information on the five business professional's ethical standard core concepts.

The first core concept that attempts to define a standard of ethical behavior for the business professional is integrity. Integrity is another of those far-reaching concepts that has many

meanings. Below is a thorough explanation of the word integrity as it pertains to the business professional:

“Integrity is an element of character fundamental to professional recognition. It is the quality from which the public trust derives and the benchmark against which a member must ultimately test all decisions.

Integrity requires a member to be, among other things, honest and candid within the constraints of client confidentiality. Service and the public trust should not be subordinated to personal gain and advantage. Integrity can accommodate the inadvertent error and the honest difference of opinion; it cannot accommodate deceit or subordination of principle.

Integrity is measured in terms of what is right and just. In the absence of specific rules, standards, or guidance, or in the face of conflicting opinions, a member should test decisions and deeds by asking: ‘Am I doing what a person of integrity would do? Have I retained my integrity?’ Integrity requires a member to observe both the form and the spirit of technical and ethical standards.”<sup>2</sup>

To the business professional, integrity is more than just being honest. The core concept of integrity requires that a business professional do whatever is possible, as long as it is ethical and legal, to serve the best interests of the constituent.

The second core concept of the business professional’s ethical standard is dignity. The term dignity is defined as seriousness and respectfulness in one’s behavior.<sup>3</sup> The business professional has an ethical responsibility to treat his constituents in a respectable manner. An example of a business professional bestowing dignity upon a constituent is when an employee is communicated with in a manner demonstrating respect. The business professional identifies the employee as an individual and also as an asset to the organization. For the business professional, the commitment to dignity “is to honor the inalienable rights of all persons.”<sup>4</sup> When the business professional practices the core concept of dignity, he tends to engage in all interactions with



humanity and feeling. Simply put, the business professional need only follow the words in the cliché “treat others in the manner that you would want to be treated” if he desires to subscribe to the highest level of acceptable ethical behavior in regards to the core concept of dignity.

The notion of fairness is the next core concept of the business professional’s ethical standard. I firmly believe that the idea of fairness is strictly subjective, but this is the case with most of the core concepts for ethical standards. Attempting to overcome the subjective nature of the notion of fairness, the business professional can make an attempt to practice fairness by practicing business with equanimity and care.<sup>5</sup> The business professional accomplishes this task by ensuring that he balances his self-interest needs with the equity for the needs and interests of others.<sup>6</sup> While it is not unethical for the business professional to act in a manner that serves his best interests, the business professional must take caution and ensure that his actions are fair and that his constituents are “best served.” The business professional’s survival and success is the result of his being victorious in competition, but this should not serve as an excuse to abandon the notion of fairness. To be considered ethically correct, the business professional should compete in a manner that does not abuse the community, competitors, or the environment.<sup>7</sup> By competing in such a manner, the business professional epitomizes the core concept of fairness and demonstrates the ability to “practice self-interest with equity for the interest of others.”<sup>8</sup>

The fourth core concept of the business professional’s ethical standard is justice. As it has been mentioned before, the business professional must act in an ethical manner in regards to his constituents. In essence what this means is that every person matters, so the business professional can take no individual for granted. The idea of equal consideration brings to the business professional’s attention the need for a “natural duty of justice.”<sup>9</sup> “Each person matters and matters equally, each person is entitled to equal consideration. ...[the business professional]

has a duty to promote just institutions, a duty not derived from consent or mutual advantage, but simply owed to persons as such.”<sup>10</sup> The business professional has the ethical responsibility to ensure that the actions of his organization promote and support a sense of justice. The organization must balance its business obligations with its moral obligations.<sup>11</sup> An example of this balancing act can be seen in the employment of local nationals in Third World countries. For instance, it may be completely legal to employ child labor and pay extremely low wages in Third World country “X.” A business professional can take advantage of this situation by simply keeping with status quo. While this may be legal according to Country X’s laws, it is not in keeping with the business professional’s core concept of justice. From an ethical standpoint, the business professional is required to balance moral obligations with business obligations. In this instance and in the spirit of justice, the business professional should engage in actions that help to strengthen Country X. This can be accomplished by paying wages that are higher than the norm or creating and funding community enhancement programs. The business professional and his organization need to work “to create that society that we would entrust ourselves to if we needed to be cared for.”<sup>12</sup>

The final core concept of the business professional’s ethical standard is respect. The business professional is expected to demonstrate respect and graciousness towards the resources that make his success possible.<sup>13</sup> Employees must be viewed as assets to the organization. As a result, the business professional needs to ensure that due respect is given to the employee by making market value wages available, along with a healthy, pleasant work environment. In addition to demonstrating respect towards the employee, the business professional should perform the same in regards to the natural environment. Nature is an asset, and as the business professional draws from this asset, he must do all that he can to replenish the source.<sup>14</sup> As the business professional

performs within the organization, he must take caution to avoid taking individuals and the environment for granted. The ethical course of action is to give due respect to the resources that make success a reality.

The business professional has an ethical standard that is based on five core concepts. Those core concepts are honesty, dignity, fairness, justice, and respect. By practicing these five core concepts, the business professional allows his constituents to build trust in him and his organization. It is my opinion that trust is the foundation of the business professional's ethical standard. The below quotation is an accurate summation of the business professional's ethical standard.

“An ethical orientation feeds the growth of trust, and is itself further developed by trust. Dignity extended to employees and customers by the company creates the foundation for trust to be exchanged. Honesty, fairness, and justice set the terms of interaction, and provide the integrity that earns trust in even unpredictable and ambiguous situations. A commitment to trust, essential in this economy of intellectual exchange, is therefore inextricably a commitment to ethics. And an ethical orientation, by practice, builds trust.”<sup>15</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> John Dalla Costa, The Ethical Imperative: Why Moral Leadership is Good Business (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1998), p. 282.

<sup>2</sup> Codes of Professional Responsibility, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> Definition obtained online from Microsoft Network Learning Dictionary located at <http://encarta.msn.com/>.

<sup>4</sup> The Ethical Imperative: Why Moral Leadership is Good Business, p. 161.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>10</sup> Will Kymlicka, “The Social Contract Tradition,” in Companion to Ethics, ed. Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 187.

## Notes

<sup>11</sup> The Ethical Imperative: Why Moral Leadership is Good Business, p. 153.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 153.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 231-232.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Ethical Standard for Society**

Until this point, I have discussed the various core concepts that attempt to define an ethical standard for both the military and business professional. I will now introduce the core concepts that attempt to define an ethical standard for society in general. As members of society, we are expected to behave in a civilized manner. While it can be debated as to what actions constitute civilized behavior, there are several core concepts of a societal ethical standard that I feel are universal and widely acknowledged. The core concepts that society employs in an effort to demonstrate a positive ethical standard are courage, temperance, truthfulness, proper ambition, and magnanimity.<sup>1</sup> It is possible to include several other moral virtues as part of the core concepts that define society's ethical standard, but the virtues listed above encapsulate what I feel is an adequate discussion concerning society's ethical standard. The following paragraphs provide a thorough explanation of each of the five core concepts that define the ethical standard for society.

Courage is the first core concept that is involved in defining an ethical standard for society. The word courage has many different meanings, and this case remains the same in the discussion of courage as a core concept of society's ethical standard. To be considered a civilized, productive member of society, an individual must possess and practice the concept of personal courage. Personal courage is more than overcoming a fear of the dark or "things that go bump in

the night.” Personal courage for an individual member of society involves that member having the personal fortitude to do the right thing when doing the right thing is not easy. Personal courage also involves an individual member of society doing the right thing even when the right thing is the unpopular decision or is not in the individual’s best interests. The individual member of society must take caution so as not to fall victim to the “vices of excess and deficiency” that are associated with courage.<sup>2</sup> The vice of excess associated with courage is known as rashness. An individual who falls victim to this vice displays very little regard for others and is totally consumed with their personal existence.<sup>3</sup> The vice of deficiency associated with courage is known as cowardice.<sup>4</sup> An individual who is known for practicing cowardice does not possess the personal strength to make difficult decisions. This type of individual will look for the easy solution, one that is possibly devoid of ethical considerations. Society requires its individual members to demonstrate personal courage, and this fact makes courage an important core concept in developing an ethical standard for society.

The next core concept that is necessary in defining an ethical standard for society is temperance. Temperance is defined as the ability to demonstrate self-restraint in the face of temptation or desire.<sup>5</sup> An individual member of society needs to act in the best interests of society if his actions are to be considered ethical. The individual must avoid the temptation to serve his needs first and society’s needs second. As with courage, temperance also has “vices of excess and deficiency.” The individual member of society should steer clear of the licentiousness, which is the vice of excess.<sup>6</sup> Licentiousness is described as the act of aggressively and selfishly pursuing one’s immoral desires.<sup>7</sup> An individual acting in this manner does not place society’s interests as a priority. Temperance’s vice of deficiency is insensibility.<sup>8</sup> An individual behaving in this manner is reluctant to demonstrate any actions or ability. This

individual is indifferent to the environment surrounding him, so he fails to meet the ethical standard that is set by society. The core concept of temperance is a vital part of defining society's ethical standard because it sets the tone for an individual's actions.

Truthfulness serves as the third core concept in shaping society's ethical standard. The core concept of truthfulness captures the essence of the words honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness. Truthfulness requires that the individual member of society be honest in his dealing or interchanges within society. I believe that the core concept of truthfulness sets the tone in defining an individual's character. Truthfulness also has "vices of excess and deficiency." The individual member of society who avoids these vices excels in the area of truthfulness. The vice of excess for truthfulness is known as boastfulness.<sup>9</sup> Boastfulness occurs when an individual inflates or exaggerates the specifics of a given situation. This action happens because an individual desires to increase or magnify his importance. Boastfulness is a perfect example of an individual placing personal interests before society's interests. Understatement is the vice of deficiency for truthfulness. Understatement happens when an individual member of society fails to accurately provide pertinent information. This can also be perceived as an individual member of society purposely de-emphasizing the importance or severity of a situation. Actions of this nature are misleading and fail to serve the best interests of society. Of the five core concepts, truthfulness is the most important in my opinion. Truthfulness is the core concept that sets the tone in defining an individual's character, and it covers a broad area in defining an ethical standard for society.

Proper ambition is the fourth core concept in defining an ethical standard for society. It is only human nature for an individual member of society to want to do well and excel in every endeavor. Proper ambition is the core concept that addresses the individual's desire to excel. An

individual member of society who desires to behave in an ethical manner sets goals and ambitions that serve personal benefits and also societal benefits. Society's interests are better served, and the individual is satisfied when proper ambition is practiced. Proper ambition is no different from the other core concepts when it comes to vices. The vice of excess for proper ambition is ambition, and the vice of deficiency for proper ambition is unambitiousness.<sup>10</sup> Ambition, the vice of excess, refers to the situation when an individual member of society does not align his personal interests with those of society. An individual who falls prey to ambition is not interested in the utilitarian concept of the "greatest good for the greatest number." Instead, an individual who is guilty of ambition is self-serving and will do whatever is necessary, be it ethical or unethical, to make sure their goals are met. Unambitiousness, the vice of deficiency, refers to the situation when an individual member of society possesses no drive or determination. An individual suffering from unambitiousness does not set goals, so there is a disservice done to both the individual and society. With unambitiousness, the interests of society are ignored. Proper ambition is an important core concept in that it details how an individual member of society can pursue personal interests while still serving the overall interests of society. The core concept of proper ambition is an integral piece of the puzzle in shaping the ethical standard for society.

The final core concept that is involved in developing an ethical standard for society is magnanimity. Magnanimity is defined as a generous or noble act.<sup>11</sup> The individual member of society best serves the interests of society and acts in an ethical manner when he conducts his actions in a gracious manner. This individual is humble and is reluctant to accept overwhelming praise for performed deeds. Magnanimity has "vices of excess and deficiency," and they are vanity and pusillanimity. The vice of excess, vanity, is described as the act of having excessive



pride. An individual who is unable to overcome vanity is guilty of taking an overabundance of gratification in his accomplishments or actions. This action runs counter to the notion of serving society's best interests since the individual is more concerned with personal praise and glory. Vanity forces an individual to sometimes act in an unethical manner in an effort to achieve much sought after praise and recognition. An individual member of society guilty of pusillanimity, the vice of deficiency, is known to be weak-spirited or feeble. Again, society's best interests cannot be served in this situation since an individual is too timid. An individual member of society stricken with pusillanimity is incapable of serving his individual needs, so it stands to reason that he is incapable of serving society's needs. The core concept of magnanimity serves as a guide for personal behavior for the individual member of society. Because of this fact, magnanimity is a required core concept in defining the ethical standard for society.

The five core concepts of society's ethical standard are courage, temperance, truthfulness, proper ambition, and magnanimity. It is these core concepts that describe a standard of behavior and performance that individual members of society are expected to acknowledge and follow. One might ask the question as to why it is necessary to have a standard of behavior for society. That question is best answered by the below statement as to why we need ethics:

"It is foolish to argue that we don't need ethics because we have laws and religious beliefs. It is because of ethics that we have laws in the first place, and we continue to need ethics to refine and perfect our legal system. We also need ethics in order to discuss the practical implications of our religious beliefs with others who do not share this belief. In addition, in situations where the reasonableness of a particular article of belief is at issue, we need ethics to help us reach a sound decision.

...Ethics permits us to interpret everyday human actions and to decide what behavior we approve in others and want to emulate ourselves."<sup>12</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Peter Vardy and Paul Grosch, The Puzzle of Ethics (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe Inc., 1997), 43.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Definition obtained online from Microsoft Network Learning Dictionary located at <http://encarta.msn.com/>.

<sup>6</sup> The Puzzle of Ethics, p. 43.

<sup>7</sup> Definition obtained online from Microsoft Network Learning Dictionary located at <http://encarta.msn.com/>.

<sup>8</sup> The Puzzle of Ethics, p. 43.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Definition obtained online from Microsoft Network Learning Dictionary located at <http://encarta.msn.com/>.

<sup>12</sup> Vincent Ryan Ruggiero, Thinking Critically About Ethical Issues, 3rd ed. (Mountain View: Mayfield Publishing Company, 1992), 7-8.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Conclusions**

I have discussed at length the various aspects of the ethical standards of the military professional, the business professional, and society in general. Thoroughly covering the different core concepts that comprise the ethical standard of the three different entities, I will now attempt to apply the detailed information to my supposition that society in general holds the military professional to a higher ethical standard. The discussion will begin by highlighting the similarities of the military professional and the business professional's ethical standard. The next step in the discussion will be to detail the differences between the military professional and the business professional's ethical standard. I will conclude the discussion with what I feel is the reason why the military professional is held to a higher standard by society.

Ethical standards and the core concepts that define them are for the most part universal. The common thread that runs within ethical standards is one of decency and respect. The ethical standards of the military professional and the business professional are similar in the sense that both call for honesty or honor. Military and business professionals are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that is consistent with the highest level of integrity. Another area in which both entities are similar is respect. Military and business professionals have the ethical responsibility to treat others with dignity. Their code requires that they "treat others in a manner in which they would want to be treated." A third area of similarity is duty. Military and

business professionals share the responsibility of placing the interests and needs of others above those of their own. The organization or the people that compose the organization are the main priority to the military and business professional. The final area of similarity between the military and business professional that I will address is loyalty. Both entities have an ethical responsibility to demonstrate unwavering loyalty to their respective organizations and its members. The above areas of similarity have a tendency to overlap, but that is the nature of core concepts. The core concepts are meant to define an accepted standard of behavior.

There is only one difference between the military professional and the business professional that I wish to address, and that is the issue of accountability. The military professional is accountable to all of society. In discharging his duties, the military professional is sometimes forced to make decisions involving life and death. Because of the finality of certain decisions, the military professional is accountable to the “mothers, fathers, spouses, and children” of the individuals whom they lead or command. In my opinion, this signifies that the military professional is accountable for the ethical nature of his actions to all of society. On the other hand, the business professional is not accountable to all of society. While the business professional is required to make serious, involved decisions that affect the lives and livelihoods of others, he is not making life or death decisions. The business professional is making decisions that only affect his constituency, not all of society. Because of this fact, I feel that the business professional is accountable to only his customers, employees, managers, investors, owners, creditors, and immediate community. It is because of this limited accountability I feel that there is a difference in accountability for the military and the business professional.

Society holds the military professional to a higher standard because the military professional is directly accountable to society as a whole. This is not the case for the business professional

since the business professional is only accountable to his constituency. The decisions reached by the military professional determine whether members of society live or die. It is because of these extreme consequences that society requires its military professionals to conduct themselves according to the highest possible ethical standard. A perfect example of society's expectation that our military professionals perform according to the highest possible ethical standard is the recent sex scandal involving the United States Air Force Academy. Numerous past female cadets recently came forward and reported that they were victims of sexual assault during their assigned time at the academy.<sup>1</sup> None of the incidents occurred during the tours of the current academy leadership; however, the Secretary of the Air Force and the Air Force Chief of Staff have stated that current academy leadership "will be replaced as part of sweeping changes designed to ensure a safe and secure environment for the school's cadets..."<sup>2</sup> It is further mentioned that "as the problems regarding sexual assault allegations predate the current leadership, we do not hold [leadership] responsible. Still, change must occur, and a new leadership team to implement these changes is in the best interest of the academy and the Air Force."<sup>3</sup> Contrary to the statements of the Secretary of the Air Force and the Air Force Chief of Staff, news editorials claim that current academy leadership may, indeed, be responsible for the current academy culture regarding sexual harassment.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, senior Air Force leadership understands the need to convey the idea to society that military professionals will be held to a high ethical standard. While not personally responsible for the actions at the academy, current academy leadership failed to signify to society that a high ethical standard environment existed at the academy. The Air Force Chief of Staff stated "our vision for the academy is to make it the best and most respected military training and educational institution in the world...one that produces America's finest military officers, and a place where moms and dads are proud to send

their children.”<sup>5</sup> This statement is indicative of the military professional’s accountability to society in general, and this is the main reason why society holds the military professional to a higher ethical standard than that of the business professional.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Rick Burnham, “Leaders Outline Academy Overhaul,” Air Force Print News Today Mar. 2003, on-line, available from <http://www.af.mil/news/Mar2003/32603296print.shtml>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Current academy leadership was accused of being unresponsive to claims of sexual abuse in an unauthored Washington Post editorial. The editorial appeared on Page A22 of the March 16, 2003 edition of the Washington Post.

<sup>5</sup> “Leaders Outline Academy Overhaul,” n.p.

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